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New Buffalo Times

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APRIL REIGN...

YOUNG ROYALTY CROWNED AT FLAG DAY PRINCESS AND PRINCE PAGEANT

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PHOTO OF 2025 FLAG DAY PRINCESS AND PRINCE LILY JADPETING AND CREEK BOERSMA WITH 2024 ROYALTY HAZEL BROSS AND FINLEY BOERSMA BY FRANCESCA SAGALA

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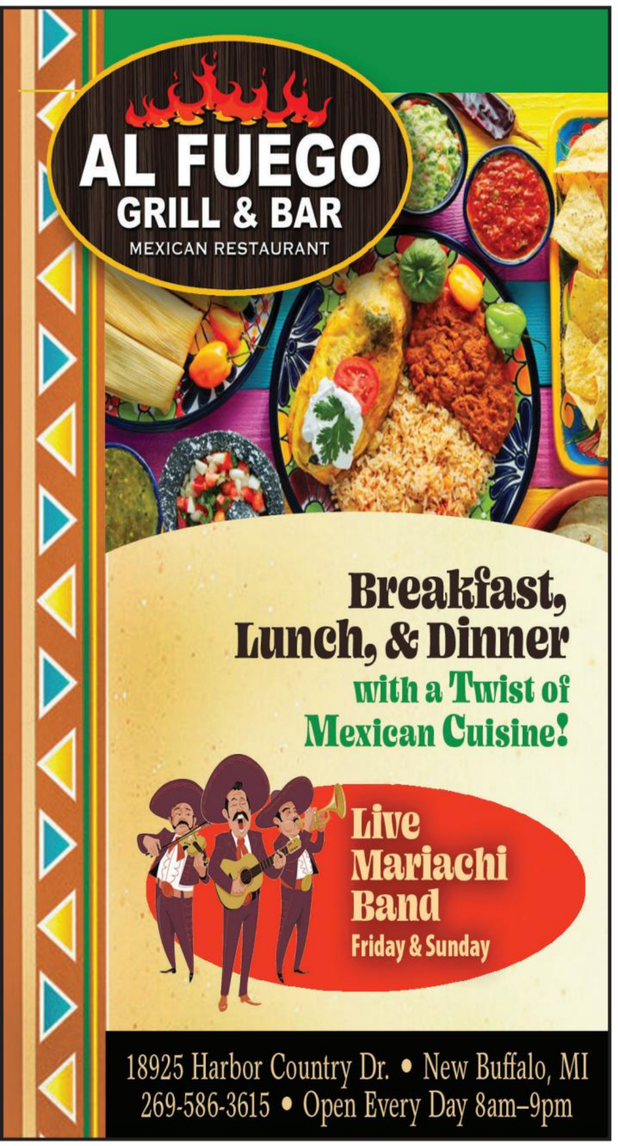
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Berrien County Health Department spotlights sexual health clinic services during STI Awareness Month

The Berrien County Health Department is spotlighting its Sexual Health Clinic services in recognition of STI Awareness Month.

BCHD's Sexual Health Clinic offers accessible, nonjudgmental and supportive services to all community members through in-person and telehealth appointments. It provides a wide variety of services that help prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections and promote overall health. Fast-track testing and walk-in services are also available to offer peace of mind.

STI-related clinic services include:

- Immunizations, including for human papillomavirus.
- STI testing and treatment.
- Rapid HIV testing and counseling.

These services are offered at lower rates than other local health care organizations, and most types of insurance are accepted.

"We encourage sexually active community members to schedule a routine STI testing," said Dionne Rigozzi, BCHD's clinical and community health services supervisor. "Our friendly staff will help assess your testing needs, provide education and, if needed, offer treatment. By getting tested regularly, you are protecting both your health and the health of your partner."

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services offers comprehensive STI testing guidance for sexually active women, men, pregnant individuals, men who have sex with men, gender diverse persons and individuals with HIV.

BCHD's Sexual Health Clinic offers appointments 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday and Tuesday at its Benton Harbor office, 2149 E. Napier Ave., and Wednesday and Thursday at its Niles office, 1205 N. Front St.

Walk-in services are available at both locations 1-4 p.m. Wednesday, and telehealth appointments are available 1-3 p.m. Monday, 9:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday and 10 a.m.-noon Thursday.

Fast-track testing offers quick testing for chlamydia and gonorrhea with a urine sample.

The service is available 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Thursday at BCHD's Benton Harbor and Niles offices for $10.

To learn more about BCHD's Sexual Health Clinic services, visit www.bchdsexualhealthclinic.com. — STAFF REPORTS

If you want to smile when they appear, "know" your enemies.
— Dino N. Fatouros

LAKESIDE EASTER EGG HUNT TO BE HELD AT HARBERT COMMUNITY PARK

The Lakeside Association once again will sponsor its annual Easter Egg Hunt, with hosting assistance from Chikaming Parks and Recreation, at 1 p.m. Saturday, April 19.

The festivities have been moved to Harbert Community Park, which is located at 13411 Red Arrow Highway in Harbert, because of construction currently taking place in Lakeside.

Separate egg hunts will be held consecutively for five age groups. And, new this year, there will be a special Adult Egg Hunt. Free bunny ears will be given to the first 50 children. Peter Cottontail will be on hand to pose for pictures. Children should remember to bring their own basket to gather eggs.

For questions, call 312-305-0496. — STAFF REPORTS

Local Government Meetings

New Buffalo Times

Democracy Requires Transparency

CITY OF NEW BUFFALO
VANCE PRICE, MAYOR
CITY COUNCIL
MARK ROBERTSON, ROGER LIJEWSKI, KAREN GEAR, RICH KNOLL, VANCE PRICE
City Council meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at 6:30PM
CITY OF NEW BUFFALO PLANNING COMMISSION MEETINGS
Meets on the 1st Tuesday of each month at 5:30PM
NEW BUFFALO TOWNSHIP BOARD
HOWARD MALES, MICHELLE HEIT, MICHELLE HANNON, PATTY IAZZETTO, BARBARA ANDERSON
Board meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at 4PM
NEW BUFFALO TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
Meets on the 1st Tuesday of each month at 6:30PM
SHERIFF BERRIEN COUNTY
Sheriff, Chuck Heit
Undersheriff, Greg Sanders
NEW BUFFALO AREA RECREATIONAL AUTHORITY
Meets at 10AM on the 2nd Wednesday of every other month (odd) at New Buffalo Township Hall, 17425 Red Arrow Highway New Buffalo
NEW BUFFALO AREA SCHOOLS BOARD
LISA WERNER, JOHN HASKINS, DENISE CHURCHILL, JENNIFER SUMMERS, VANESSA THUN, STEPHEN DONNELLY, GREG VOSBERG
CHIKAMING TOWNSHIP CHIKAMING TOWNSHIP BOARD
DAVID BUNTE, PAULA DUDIAK, LIZ RETTIG, RICHARD SULLIVAN, ARTHUR ANDERSON
Chikaming Board meets on the 2nd Thursday of each month at 6:30PM
CHIKAMING TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
Meets on the 1st Wednesday of each month at 6:30PM
THREE OAKS
THREE OAKS TOWNSHIP BOARD
Meets on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7PM
VILLAGE OF THREE OAKS BOARD
Meets on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7PM
GRAND BEACH
Meets on the 3rd Wednesday at 5PM EST
KIMBERLY WOLNIK, CLERK-TREASURER
HARRY WALDER, JACK GRACE, ED SEBASTIAN, PETER DOERR, EDWARD BRANDES
MICHIANA
VILLAGE OF MICHIANA COUNCIL
Meets on the 2nd Friday of each month at 1PM

New Michigan corn leader has long roots on the farm

BY STAN MADDUX

The Michigan Corn Growers Association has a new executive director whose roots in agriculture date back to 1852 on a farm where his family still lives and operates.

Scott Piggott has been in his new role since March 12.

Previously, he spent 24 years at Michigan Farm Bureau where he split his time as chief executive officer and working in areas like public policy on environmental issues protecting farms.

"I feel like it's the right place for me to be at the right time. So, I'm very excited," he said.

His new duties include serving as executive director of the Corn Marketing Program of Michigan.

Piggott, 53, said his primary objectives are increasing demand for Michigan corn and being a "great partner" to other agriculture organizations to strengthen the industry, in general, in the state.

He sees opportunity to expand the market for corn through the state's ethanol industry, which accepts about 36 percent of corn produced in Michigan for making the fuel blend.

Piggott said the livestock industry is another potential source for increasing demand for Michigan corn growers.

"The tide rises all boats when a majority of corn in the state goes into livestock. The livestock industry is very important and we want to make sure all of Michigan agriculture is successful and we'll have our place in it," he said.

A willow tree now exists where a log cabin once stood as the first homestead on his family's 1,000 acre farm in Fowler about 30 minutes north of Lansing.

Piggott said the rest of the dwellings that followed are lived in now by other family members, including a roughly 150 year old residence where he and his wife raised their children and still call home.

His father, Dan, and uncle, Dave, with help from family members remain the primary operators of the farm but Piggott still pitches in with things like planting seed whenever he gets a chance.

"I love being out there when I am and love serving farmers when I'm not," he said.

His family raises corn, soybeans, wheat and beef cattle.

It's corn that seems to flow mostly in Piggott's veins, though.

Corn production was one of his major focuses while working toward his bachelor's degree and master's degree in Ag Engineering at Michigan State University.

Piggott said he's very proud to be a sixth generation farmer on the same ground but with it comes a sense of great responsibility to make sure it's there for family members coming up the ranks.

He also spoke about a special bond with like-minded family members like his father.

"I've been able to work with dad as a partner and friend. It's been one of the joys of my life," he said.

The essence of all beautiful art, all great art, is gratitude. *— Friedrich Nietzsche*

Library closed after truck crashes through wall

BY STAN MADDUX

The Michigan City Public Library is closed to repair damage caused by a pick-up truck crashing through the fiberglass exterior building.

According to Michigan City Police, the collision, which occurred late morning Sunday, March 30, happened when the driver, Blake Skoda, was stopped at a traffic light at U.S. 12.

The 42 year old Skoda told investigators he took a drink from an energy beverage, felt tightness in his chest and blacked out.

After losing consciousness, police said it appears the Michigan City area man stomped on the gas pedal, sending his 2017 Dodge Ram straight across all four lanes of U.S. 12 and into the north side of the structure facing the highway.

Library Director Don Glossinger said the vehicle came to stop after running into multiple heavy shelves of books after damaging a study room and conference room.

Fortunately, Glossinger said the library is closed on Sundays because that area of the library is typically heavily used during regular business hours.

"There would have been people in that vicinity," he said.

Skoda told investigators his vehicle was inside the building after regaining consciousness.

He and his 11-year-old son, Evan, were transported by ambulance to Franciscan Health hospital with injuries described by police as minor.

Glossinger said they hope to reopen the library Monday, April 7.

In addition to a general clean-up, Glossinger said the hole in the outside wall was covered with plywood but a piece of fiberglass cut to specs will be ordered and installed for a permanent repair.

Glossinger said about one-third of the damaged rooms will have to be fixed but will be cordoned off before the library reopens to keep patrons away from those spaces until they're reconstructed.

Repairs will also have to be made to damaged areas of the heating and cooling system.

Glossinger said he wasn't sure how long it'll take to fix all of the damage but feels it will be an extended period with the cost to be covered by insurance.

"It'll take some time to get it all put back," he said.

Elementary students sing tunes from around the world

Students sing tunes from around the world onstage

Music from around the world featured at spring concert

BY FRANCESCA SAGALA

Members of the audience at the New Buffalo Performing Arts Center were taken on a musical journey around the world during the New Buffalo Elementary School's annual spring concert Wednesday, March 26.

Students in the third, fourth and fifth grade sang their way through traditional and new songs from a variety of cultures, such as "Japanese Snow Song (Yuki)," "Crawdad Creek" and "Big World, Small World."

To accompany the singing, a select group of students also played the bongos and Marcelo Martins provided the piano music.

The show was directed by Janelle Foulk, the elementary school music teacher.

Marcelo Martins accompanies students' singing on the piano

Elementary students sing worldy tunes

Fair announces Grandstand line-up

Berrien County Youth Fair officials have announced the 2025 lineup of entertainment acts for its 80th year.

Starting the week off at 5 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 10, the BCYF will bring back the Street Legal Pickup Truck and Tractor Pull for its fourth year. After continued popularity and with no gate admission fee into the fair itself, this event is an affordable option for those looking to kick off the week a day early. This event will be presented by Dale Seyfred – Pioneer Seed and Twin Maple Farm Market in Galien.

The always popular, always loud, Truck and Tractor Pull is slated to return at 7 p.m. Monday, Aug. 11, with a different set of classes than Sunday. This year's pull will again be an NTPA regional event and will feature 4WD Trucks, Super Farm, Hot Farm and Superstock Combo Tractors. The event will be presented by Keystone Cooperative.

"Kids Day," which is Tuesday, Aug. 12, the grandstand will feature three free Circus Continental shows. Circus Continental has been entertaining kids and adults alike since the late 1960s at the Berrien County Youth Fair. Don't miss out on this family and wallet friendly show.

At 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 13, rising star and influencer, Cooper Alan, will take the stage presented by United Federal Credit Union.

An independent artist who's a native of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Alan has racked up more than 250 million streams, a massive digital presence with more than 15 million followers across all social media platforms and a touring footprint that has sold over 125,000 tickets to date. After releasing "Take Forever," a five-song EP telling the real-life story behind his wedding in the fall of 2023, Alan was named as a 2024 Pandora Ten Artist to Watch and named to the Sirius XM and Pandora 2024 Future Five List. Soon after launching his single "Take Forever", it climbed to number one on Sirius XM the Highway's Hot 30 Weekend Countdown. With his latest singles "Jesus Saves", "Suit and Tie (Sixteen Tons)", "Wake Me Up (feat. Aloe Blacc), and "Plead the Fifth" Alan takes his first step into the next batch of music to come. Coming off a sold-out Australia headline tour at the end of 2024, he is launching his "To the Bar Tour" hitting markets across the United States in the spring of 2025.

Hitting the stage at 7 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 14, the BCYF will "Open the Vault," with The Riflemen singing a set list of hits from various artists that have performed at the Berrien County Youth Fair over the years.

Returning at 8 p.m. Friday, Aug. 15, derby promoter TNT Demolition Derby will bring back the crowd favorite demolition derby. Derby fans can expect to see classes such as Big Car Motor Swap, Big Car Lite Modifieds, Compact Welds, MWFA Street Stock, Small Car Stock FWD and Powerwheels for the kids.

At 7 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 16, fans can rest assured the BCYF has brought back the crowd favorite, Bullmania, including crowd favorite bull riding and kid favorite, mutton busting.

Tickets for all grandstand shows go on sale starting at 10 a.m. April 9 at the Fair office, online at www.bcyf.org or by phone at 269-473-1500 (grandstand ticket fees do not include gate admission). All tickets purchased online will have an additional per ticket processing fee and a credit card convenience fee.

The 2025 Berrien County Youth Fair runs Aug. 11-16 with the theme of "Fiesta at the Fair".

The 2025 BCYF Grandstand Entertainment line-up:

- SUNDAY, AUG. 10: Street Legal Pickup Truck & Tractor Pull Presented by Dale Seyfred – Pioneer Seed and Twin Maple Farm Market, Galien, MI. Show time: 5 p.m. Ticket Price: $15 general admission seating
- MONDAY, AUG. 11: NTPA Regional Truck Pull featuring 4WD Trucks, Super Farm, Hot Farm, and Superstock Combo Tractors. Presented by Keystone Cooperative. Show time: 7 p.m. Ticket Price: $17, $15, $10
- TUESDAY, AUG. 12: Circus Continental. Show time: 1, 4 and 7 p.m. Ticket Price: Free. Also on Tuesday: High school children and younger are admitted for free to the fair for Kids' Day.
- WEDNESDAY, AUG. 13: Cooper Alan. Presented by: United Federal Credit Union. Show Time: 7 p.m. Ticket Price: $45, $35, $25.
- THURSDAY, AUG. 14: From the Vault: The Riflemen singing a set list of hits from various artists that have performed at the Berrien County Youth Fair over the years. Show Time: 7 p.m. Ticket Prices: $5 Chair Seating, free Grandstand Seating.
- FRIDAY, AUG. 15: Demolition Derby. Produced by TNT Demolition Derby Michigan. Show Time: 8:00 p.m. Presented by: Adams & Son Heating and Cooling. Ticket Prices: $15
- SATURDAY, AUG. 16: Bullmania. Produced by: Super Kicker Rodeo. Show Time: 7 p.m. Presented by: Rural King. Ticket Prices: $15. —

STAFF REPORTS

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From the Bleachers

COLUMN BY KURT MARGGRAF IN CHICAGO

Last Thursday was the official opening of Major League Baseball, if you don't count that awkward two game series that pitted the Cubs against the Dodgers in Japan the week before.

I spent the afternoon listening to the White Sox, surprisingly, beat the Angels by a score of 8-1.

Last year,the Sox had the worst record in Major League Baseball history, and they really hadn't done much of anything at all to improve their team during the offseason.

It was an unexpected and welcomed victory for the South Siders. If nothing else, it gave White Sox fans and players hope that this season would be better than last. What a great story it would be if the Sox pulled a rabbit out of a hat and managed to play competitive games this season.

The Cubs were in Arizona, so their game against the Diamondbacks wasn't going to start until after 9:00 p.m.

The games in Tokyo started at 5:00 a.m., which is way too early for me, and the game in Arizona was going to finish near midnight, which was getting to be a little late for me, but I put on my big boy pants at about 8:30 p.m., and took off for my favorite establishment that I knew would have at least one of their many television sets tuned into the game.

The bar manager put the Cubs game on the TV right in front of me, while all around there were NCAA basketball games and the Bulls game.

Everyone settled in to watch the game of their choice, and all was right in this sports fans world. Often times, when everything seems perfect, things go awry, but not that opening day.

I love baseball, and even though I wish they would make the playing field more even, the game holds a special place in my heart.

My Dad would take me out of school, drive all the way from the far south side of Chicago to Wrigley Field, so we could see the Cubs opener.

I took my children, my children took me and their children, etc..., my son and I peaked early but one of my grandsons is playing in college. I bought one of my granddaughters a Cub baby bottle when she was a baby and it quickly became her favorite. My mood is directly related to how the Cubs do, especially on opening day.

Well, this year, I was a happy camper as the Cubbies prevailed by a score of 10-6.

The cherry on top was the Bulls. Josh Giddey threw up a half court prayer at the buzzer-beater that hit nothing but net, to beat LeBron James and the LA Lakers at 119-117. The Bulls are starting to be fun.

The NCAA basketball tournament is down to the Final Four, and for only the second time ever, all four teams remaining are number one seeds.

Happy spring !

Robin Williams said, "Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's Party.'"

Be kind. Talk to you next week. Peace, love, and happiness.

All things will be clear and distinct to the man who does not hurry; haste is blind and improvident. — *Livy*

SPORTS

Bison start season with a doubleheader sweep

BY STAN MADDUX

The New Buffalo High School varsity baseball team opened the season with a doubleheader sweep at home Thursday, March 27.

The Bison defeated Lawrence 21-0 and 15-0.

Head Coach Adam Lijewski said the lopsided victories had more to do with Lawrence having a lot of young, still developing players.

He said a more accurate barometer for measuring the ability of his senior laden team, which is trying to repeat as District 4 champions, will be a doubleheader scheduled for April 8 at River Valley.

"I think we're going to be very competitive this year as long as we stay healthy and the guys stay focused," he said.

Nick Wolfe led the way on offense in both games by driving in nine runs with five hits that included a double and triple on a ball hit deep into the outfield gap.

"He pounded the ball," Lijewski said.

Vaughn Nikkel drove in three runs in the first game with a double then hit two more doubles along with a single in the second game.

Bison pitchers Jeff Tertel, Braedan Bergerson and Drew Bowen did not allow a hit in the games, which were both called after a combined five innings because of the sizable leads.

Lijewski said the early performance of his hitters has him more confident about their ability to score up and down the line-up, which was a problem at times last season.

He said the team also seems hungry to repeat as District 4 champions after struggling to win the two previous seasons.

"They've all been working out. They've all gained strength. They all throw harder. They want it, man. They got that feeling last year. I think they're going to go at it pretty hard this year," he said.

Chicago developer chosen for major housing/grocery development in Michigan City

BY STAN MADDUX

A developer has been chosen for a new residential and retail investment projected at $200 million in Michigan City's downtown area.

DAC Development out of Chicago was awarded the contract by the city, which owns the 1.5 acre site at 5th and Pine streets. The plans call for construction of 500 or more multi-level apartments and a grocery store.

Clarence Hulse, Director of the Economic Development Corporation Michigan City, said the city insisted a grocery store be included in the development since there is no such facility right now in that area.

Hulse said the city owns the former Memorial Hospital site, which was cleared a number of years ago for redevelopment.

"The north side is considered a food desert. We wanted to ensure that whatever happens there we have a guaranteed grocery store as part of the mix," he said.

Michigan City native, Greg Klosowski, was assigned to be the architect for the development.

DAC Development, whose previous work includes skyscraper construction in Chicago, was chosen from four finalists described by Hulse as all "high level" developers. Initially, there were nine applicants for the job.

Hulse credited the amount of interest in the project to the potential investors now see in the community enjoying the beginnings of a rebirth in the downtown area.

A 12 story residential tower is currently under construction at the new South Shore Commuter Line train station on Franklin St.

Construction of two similar sized towers to contain hotel rooms and condominiums along U.S. 12 next to City Hall is expected to begin in the summer.

The catalyst for all of the new investment is considered to be the recent improvements to the South Shore Railroad commuter line reducing one way trips to and from Chicago by about 30 minutes.

That combined with the lakefront and other existing offerings such as Blue Chip Casino, Lighthouse Place Premium Outlets Mall, nearby Indiana Dunes National Park and the Downtown Arts District seemed to tip the scale in the city's favor.

"We have been discovered," Hulse said.

He said it'll take about two years to perform all of the preliminary work necessary before construction can start on the housing and grocery store development.

To Your Health

COLUMN BY KAREN EDWARDS ND

FLEA AND TICK CONTROL – NATURALLY

It is that time of year to start thinking about how you are going to protect your animal against those disgusting parasites.

Each year, pets receive a cocktail of toxic chemicals, intended to kill fleas and ticks. These include collars, sprays, dips, dusts and more. When you treat your animals, they may not be the only ones affected by the toxic chemicals. If your dog rubs his flea collar all over your couch, the whole family is now exposed.

A report by the Natural Resources Defense Councilfound that many insect control products intended to treat cats and dogs for fleas and ticks kill hundreds of pets each year and injure tens of thousands. Many of these products include Organophosphate Compounds that are known to have toxic effects that are linked to neurological disorders, endocrine system problems, allergies and assortedcancers.

The NRDC found that dangerously high levels of pesticide residue can remain on a dog or cat's fur for weeks, even after a flea collar has been removed from the animal. They also found that residues from two pesticides used in flea collars – tetrachlorvinphos and propoxur – were high enough to pose a serious health risk to children and adults who play with their pets.

So what can you do? Ask your vet about trying the least toxic options, minimizing the risks to your pets and your family. They are available if you ask.

To help keep the flea and tick population under control, use a flea comb regularly to catch fleas – then drown them in water. Wash pet bedding and vacuum regularly. Bathe your pet with a natural shampoo.

Give your pet the greatest gift possible - radiant health! The bottom line is that fleas, like any parasite, are more attracted to weaker animals. You'll see this clearly in multi-animal households. Old Bowzer that has allergies and scratches all the time gets the most fleas. It pays big dividends to have your animal as healthy as possible.

Consider natural options for your pet. Many stores sell products that will not harm your animal or the environment (or other household members.) Oral supplements such as garlic and brewer's yeast combination are also beneficial.Dematiaceous Earth dusting is safe and effective and keeping fleas and ticks at bay.

Make your own spray. In 6 oz. of distilled water, add essential oils. 10 drops lemongrass, 3 drops thyme, 2 drops cinnamon, 3 drops peppermint and 4 drops eugenol. Let your animal smell a bit on your hands. Shake the bottle before each use. Do not get into your pets eyes or ears. Spray some on your hands or directly to the animal's coat and just rub all over the fur. Making sure you are getting their feet and tail too. You really don't need a lot. Natural defenses will be noxious to fleas, ticks and mosquitoes with nature's ingredients, without dangerous side effects.

Just as you would not want to put chemical ingredients on your animal, please make sure your essential oils are 100% natural. There are many fragrance oils out there that are made of chemical substances too.

Karen Edwards is a board-Certified Dr. of Naturopathy, Master Herbalist, Vegan and Raw food Chef. She is owner of Holistic Alternatives in New Buffalo and La Porte for over 25 years.

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FEEDING AMERICA

Young royalty crowned at Flag Day Princess and Prince pageant

BY FRANCESCA SAGALA

The area's youngest royalty was crowned on the Turner Stage at The Acorn Center of the Performing Arts Sunday, March 30.

Lily Jaspering and Creek Boersma were crowned the 2025 Flag Day Princess and Prince.

A second grader at New Buffalo Elementary School, Lily lives at home with her parents, Wesley and Jennica Jaspering, her three siblings and her dog. Her favorite subject in school is computers and she loves to eat cake, play with her mother and go swimming at her Nana's in the summer.

"Throwing candy" in the annual Flag Day Parade is what Lily said she most looks forward to with being princess.

Lily's no stranger to royalty, as she's currently 2025 First Runner-up to Little Miss New Buffalo and was crowned second runner-up the previous year. Her sister, Lexie, was the 2023 Flag Day Princess.

The son of Dallas and Madison Boersma, Creek, who was the lone Prince contestant, is a kindergartener at Bridgman Elementary School who lives at home with his six siblings, two dogs, a cat and an axolotl. His favorite subject in school is math and he loves to play with his dogs and go to the beach.

"You get to throw candy" in the parade was what Creek also said he most looked forward to with being the prince.

He was crowned by his older brother Finley, who was last year's Flag Day Prince. Lily was crowned by Hazel Bross, the 2025 princess.

The other princess contestants were Jessi, Paulina Hernandez, Avery Allen, Teya Chase, Stella Stahnke, Isabella Hernandez and Elle Gibson.

Avery Allen

Creek Boersma

Lily Jaspering

Paulina Hernandez

Contestant Jessi

Isabella Hernandez

The royal contestants line the stage

2024 Princess Hazel Bross crowns 2025 Princess Lily Jaspering

Elle Gibson

Three Oaks royalty talks with 2024 Flag Day Princess and Prince, Hazel Bross and Finley Boersma

Teya Chase

Miss Three Oaks and River Valley Ava-Marie Ledesma leads the contestants in a dance

Stella Stahnke

This year, the Flag Day Princess and Prince will have the chance to participate in all the Flag Day weekend's activities, including the Saturday, June 7, 5K, the 11 a.m. pet parade and the Quilts of Valor presentation at 2 p.m. and riding in the "World's Largest Flag Day Parade" at 3 p.m. Sunday, June 8, in downtown Three Oaks. The young royalty will also represent Three Oaks Flag Day at the Memorial Day ceremony at Forest Lawn Cemetery.

Lily and Creek also received a royal photo shoot, which was donated by Harrington Photography in Three Oaks.

Judges for this year's pageant were Lauren Vegter, who majors in dance and accounting at Western Michigan University and whose pageant titles include 2023 Miss Blossomtime; Olivia Ippel, who's majoring in communications at Lake Michigan College and was 2023 Miss St. Joseph and 2023 Second Runner-up to Miss Blossomtime and Jason Niemzyk, who's been the commander of the Three Oaks American Legion Post 204 for the past five years, is a trustee on the Three Oaks Village Council and whose daughter, Mya, was 2024 Miss Three Oaks/River Valley.

The teller was Gail Freehling.

Emceeing the pageant were 2025 Miss Three Oaks/River Valley Ava-Marie Ledesma, first runner-up Lydia Habel and second runner-up Mikayla Falzone. Pageant sponsors were Three Oaks American Legion Post 204, Journeyman Distillery and Maderia.

The Three Oaks Flag Day Hog Roast, which raises funds for Three Oaks' Flag Day Weekend, will take place from 5-8 p.m. Saturday, April 26, at the Three Oaks American Legion Post 204.

The event will include a silent and live auction and live folk, rock, and soul acoustic guitar by Jack Cunningham Music. Tickets will be available at the door for $20.

This year will mark the 74th Flag Day Parade.

"Anyone who has been around for our Flag Day festival knows the importance of this holiday and what it holds in our community...This is a time we come together to celebrate our town, our country and our flag and, most importantly, our veterans," Ledesma said.

OBITUARIES

Janice Dea Briese

1940-2025

Janice Dea Briese, 84, of Sawyer, passed away Monday, March 31, 2025 in the comfort of her family's presence.

Her life began October 14, 1940 in Sawyer, Michigan the youngest of two children born to Conrad and Olga Krieger.

Janice's family meant everything to her. She cherished spending time with her three children, and was always up for a road trip with them to Mackinac Island. Once she had her grandchildren, she always had something planned for them. She would take them to the Mendel Center for the kids shows, attending the BC Youth Fair, and going to the movies and parks. Janice would spoil them by always picking up The Flour Shop cookies as an afterschool treat. She was an avid sports fan, and always cheering for her favorite teams; the Cubs, Steelers, and University of Michigan football. She enjoyed watching the baby geese and ducks at the park. Janice enjoyed watching The Price is Right, Wheel of Fortune, Murder She Wrote, and Gunsmoke. Janice could always be found at Cracker Barrel, where she was a regular and the staff knew her by name. Janice was always making jokes, and known to be clever and quick-witted. She was always there for her family; it was the little things she did for them throughout their lives that will stay with them forever.

Janice will be greatly missed by family and friends. She is survived by her, two daughters, Tammy Briese of Benton Harbor, Jamie (Chris Scameheorn) Daniel of Stevensville; one son, Lee Briese of Stevensville; six grandchildren, Paige (Jimmy) McIntyre, Allyson (David Forgey) Crutcher, both of Benton Harbor, Brianna (Tim) Gould of Three Oaks, Ryan (Madie) Westling of Niles, Jenna (Jason Benoit) Crutcher of Arlington, VA, Nichole Westling of Berrien Springs; three great grandchildren, Reese, Reagan, Waylon, and one great grandson on the way: and a host of nieces, a nephew, and cousins.

She was preceded in death by her parents, and her brother Norman "Sonny" Krieger.

Family and friends will gather Saturday, April 5, 2025 from 10:00 a.m. until time of service at 11:00 a.m., in Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, 5791 Sawyer Road, Sawyer.

Janice will be laid to rest in Riverside Cemetery.

The family prefers contributions in memory of Janice be made to Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, 5791 Sawyer Road, Sawyer, Michigan 49125.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Wagner Family Funerals Pobocik Chapel, Three Oaks. Please share a memory or a message online at www.wagnercares.com.

A Day in the Life

REMEMBERING THE GOOD AND THE BAD

BY LAWRENCE VON EBELER

Mom and Dad were very popular in high school. He was Captain of the football team and she was Captain of the women's basketball team. She was from wealth and he was from the wrong side of the tracks, but they were in love and went on to marry during the depression. shortly after highschool.

We lived in one of my step grandfathers' homes, Dr. Dunkel. He was my Grandmother's second husband after divorcing Grandpa. He was the town doctor and very popular. He built Grandmother a new house and she was the envy with her new house and car after living destitute with Grandpa Ebel's bare living standards as a tree cutter.

Dad was taken from the divorce by his father, and his sister went to live with her mother, as was the custom at the time. Grandmother lived in her newfound luxury and Dad went with his destitute father and Zadie, his father's second wife. They lived in near poverty in a tiny unpainted house in a little village that wasn't even a dot on the map. He and Zadie had a son and the sun rose and set on him, he would get all kinds of gifts at Christmas time while my Dad would get a pair of socks if he was lucky.

But he had Grandpa Dunkle as a support system who financed him in a small grocery store that unfortunately went belly up and Dad never got over it and turned down Grandpa Dunkle's offer to send him to college because he felt so guilty about the grocery store.

Of course that was peanuts to Grandpa Dunkel. He left Dad as the Executor of his estate for which Dad turned the whole estate into US Bonds, the safest investment there was at the time but not the most profitable.

Then when my Mom and Dad bought their farm they borrowed from Grandma and it possessed Dad until he paid her off. As it turned out she died in a nursing home just as her money ran out for lack of a better money manager. She lived 20 years past Grandpa Dunkel.

The farm was a dubious investment. It had been a rental farm for decades and was not kept up, to say the least. The old farm house was a wreck and the kitchen sink drain ran out on the ground beside the back door. It was so old that the kitchen cabinets were too low for the smaller generation and Mother had to stand at them with one hip hitched down which caused her back aches. Mice and rats ran in the walls of the house because an old man lived on one side of it and he stored grain on the other side that attracted vermin for miles.

The folks painted and papered the entire house but that did little for getting rid of the pests. When we went to bed you could hear them running in the walls. Not pleasant. There was no furnace and so we had to refill the space heaters in the living room and kitchen several times a day. It was a nightmare; how my mother put up with all of this when she grew up in an affluent home I don't know!

Dad called a family meeting for after supper one night. I was thrilled because we had never had one before! His purpose for the meeting was to give all of us a chance to choose whether we would rather have a furnace or a TV? We unanimously chose a furnace! We finally got a TV when I was in junior high school. I was arriving home from school on the school bus when I saw the enormous antenna going up! I ran off the school bus and inside the house were two TV's turned on side by side. We had to decide which one was the best. I liked the one that also had a record player. I lost. Minutes later the electricity went out!

We then saw the only town ambulance go by with sirens screeching and we assumed it was going to a car accident. Dad and I jumped in the car to follow the sleek Packard ambulance (It was something you did in a small town back then). Unfortunately it was a terrible car accident in which a young couple was killed. It put a damper on our first home TV experience to say the least.

These are memories of my growing up, not all pleasant.

Countywide Respite Home for Offenders proposed in Michigan City

BY STAN MADDUX

A home for up to 20 male La Porte County offenders to help them recover from substance abuse is proposed in Michigan City.

The projected $3.1 million facility would be constructed on the city's northwest side in the area of the former St. Anthony Hospital.

The city council last night heard from Micki Webb, who's involved with the effort through the La Porte County Drug Free Partnership, a not-for-profit organization.

She said the respite home would be for La Porte County residents only with referrals from the courts and other local sources involved in the criminal justice system.

Webb said close to $1 million of in-kind donations have been collected already to help pay for cost of construction while funding like state and federal grants would go toward operating expenses.

She said there's also a cost savings aspect for taxpayers considering the cost of housing each offenders in the La Porte County Jail is over $17,000 annually.

Webb said the need here is great.

"Unfortunately, La Porte County does not have any recovery residences. Porter County and St. Joseph County have several," she said.

She said residents of the recovery home would stay for up to two years while receiving additional case management and other help like job training to assist in their recoveries and becoming productive citizens.

Webb said such facilities assist in recovering from drug and alcohol abuse because offenders once released from jail are not returning to their original environments where temptation could still exist.

She said the home would be run through the Indiana Department of Mental Health.

Webb said a funding request for an undisclosed amount from the city council will be made at a later time, but the La Porte County Council has pledged $750,000 toward the facility.

"In putting these pieces together, we're trying to make it happen," she said.

Goldberry Woods to host second annual 'Hoop House Planting Experience'

Goldberry Woods, a renowned micro-farm and retreat destination in Union Pier, is thrilled to announce the return of its Spring Micro Farm Planting Experience Saturday, April 12.

This unique, hands-on event offers participants the opportunity to deepen their gardening knowledge and learn sustainable farming techniques alongside Julie, the innkeeper and micro-farming expert who leads Goldberry Woods' farm-to-table initiative.

The Spring Micro Farm Planting Experience invites attendees to engage with the land and cultivate their gardening skills in the heart of Goldberry Woods' thriving farm. Under Julie's expert guidance, participants will gain practical knowledge of soil amendments, seed starting, irrigation techniques, and small-scale farming tools. In addition, the workshop will include a special focus on planting, with participants rolling up their sleeves to amend soil, set up irrigation lines, and plant a variety of vegetables, herbs, and flowers in the farm's Hoop House and field gardens.

"We're so excited to bring back this hands-on event for a second year," said Julie, innkeeper and micro-farming expert at Goldberry Woods. "It's not just about planting; it's about creating a connection to the earth, learning sustainable practices, and gaining the confidence to grow your own food. Participants will leave not only with valuable gardening skills but also with a deeper understanding of how sustainable farming practices contribute to our community's well-being."

In addition to the gardening workshop, the event will feature "bonus learning stations," including activities such as tick tube making (an initiative to help protect against Lyme disease), quail hatching (demonstrating their role in the local ecosystem), and a showcase of Julie's favorite gardening tools and resources.

Participants will enjoy a hearty, farm-fresh lunch made with ingredients from the farm, providing a chance to relax and reflect on the morning's work. Each guest will also take home seedlings to start their own gardens, as well as milkweed seeds to help support the declining monarch butterfly population.

This event is open to individuals of all experience levels, though parents are encouraged to supervise children as there are no specific children's activities. Proper attire is recommended, including long pants and closed-toed shoes suitable for gardening.

The Spring Micro Farm Planting Experience will be from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. April 12 at Goldberry Woods. The cost is $50 per person, which includes lunch and take-home gifts.

Those interested can reserve their spot by visiting www.goldberrywoods.com/experience and prepaying via Venmo or PayPal @GoldberryWoods. — STAFF REPORTS

Overnight racing on two lane road leads to OWI arrest

BY STAN MADDUX

Two drivers were racing at well over twice the speed limit on a curvy two lane road near Michigan City before one of them was handcuffed for drunk driving.

That's according to La Porte County Police, who arrested Marcus Mitchell, 32, of Michigan City for Class A misdemeanor operating while intoxicated.

Police said a sheriff's deputy spotted two vehicles on Johnson Road traveling at high speeds early Saturday, March 29, in a 45 mph zone.

After turning around, the deputy in his bid to catch up was traveling nearly 90 miles per hour but lost sight of the vehicles.

However, the drivers soon came into close view of the officer after they stopped for a red light at the intersection with U.S. 20.

Police said the officer approached Mitchell, who was the lead driver, as the other vehicle fled the scene.

A bottle of beer was spotted in a cup holder beside Mitchell, who had a .099 percent blood alcohol level or above the .08 percent limit for legally operating a motor vehicle, police said.

During the race, police said the vehicles drove by two pedestrians, who estimated their speeds at over 100 mph.

Mom charged with leaving kids in cold, filthy conditions

BY STAN MADDUX

Four children were practically abandoned in a home with no heat, forcing them to wear layers of clothing underneath blankets and in filthy conditions.

Those are the allegations drawn in the four counts of Level 5 felony neglect of a dependent filed in La Porte Superior Court 1 against Ashley McComas, 40, of Michigan City.

According to court documents, a late January welfare check at Tall Timbers Apartments on the city's east side revealed the temperature inside the home was 45 degrees in nearly subzero conditions outside.

The fan on the furnace was running but the air blowing out was not heated, police said.

According to police, the oldest child said they had been without heat "for a while."

There was also cold air coming into the home from a back door that contained no window pane.

Police said the back door could not be reached because of the amount of garbage and various other items on the floor.

Court documents also revealed bags of garbage and trash along with feces were on the floor in other areas of the apartment and no toilet paper was in either one of the two bathrooms.

Police said the kitchen sink had garbage, dishes and stagnant water in it.

The refrigerator contained just a head of lettuce and a moldy onion while there was nothing inside the freezer except for mold, according to court documents.

Police said there were also no mattresses inside most of the children's bed frames.

The investigation alleges McComas left the children alone for months to be with a man living nearby except when she returned home about once a day to check on them.

During that period, she also received an eviction notice ordering them out of the residence by February 3.

During the welfare check, McComas was found where she had been staying and blamed her children for the conditions inside the home, police said.

The children were soon placed into the care of grandmother who previously had custody of the kids, according to court documents.

McComas could face anywhere from a one to six year sentence on each count.

A Writer's Life...

DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF TELEVISION ANIMATION

BY JACK OLESKER

My safe place...

I walked into Lori's office with, "So what does an assistant story editor do?"

Lori answered, "Assist the story editor, of course."

I'm unamused, making it clear by saying, "Very funny."

She smiled. It occurred to me when I first came to DIC, that Lori knew just about everything that was happening or that would happen.

I watched as she glanced at the lighted buttons on her phone and I deduced, with me here in her office, unless the call was from Jean, Andy or VP of Production Kevin O'Donnell, she just ignored it. I also liked how she held up a hand to stop anyone approaching her office.

It made me feel like I was important to her. I still wasn't sure why I was important to her. Years ago, when I'd first arrived in L.A., I visited film studio exec Sherry Lansing (Fatal Attraction, The Accused) at her Columbia Pictures offices. Along with Bill Castle, (The Tingler, Rosemarie's Baby) Sherry had bought the film rights to my first novel, No Place Like Home when she was at MGM. We were in the middle of a meeting when her phone buzzed. She answered it and after a moment told her assistant, "Tell Warren I'll call him back." When she clicked off, I asked who the call was from. When sheanswered, "Warren Beatty" I thought I was gonna die.

I'd written a handful of television scripts, but other writers had written more...many more. I decided not to think about it; just do a 'Zen thing' and let it go. I was, after all, in L.A. and Zen was big in L.A. It was said "Zen can lessen the tension in your body, relax tightened muscles and that by 'letting go' you can open your awareness beyond yourself." Well, I'd begun feeling my tension lessening and my muscles were relaxing. I hoped, eventually, I'd "open my awareness beyond myself". But at the moment that wasn't important because I was doing what I want to do – writing for television...and I was going to be paid fifteen hundred bucks a week for doing it.

Lori waited for me to say something, but I didn't. For the moment she let my question about what an assistant story editor does hang in mid-air.

There's an old joke in the entertainment industry – actually half-a-joke: As two executives walk toward each other in the corridors of power at Twentieth Century Fox, one says, "Good morning" and the other thinks "I wonder what he means by that..." It's an L.A. thing but it was never my thing. I'm a former Chicago boy. We slap leather, skin that snake and shoot straight from the hip; no unspoken subtext involved.

When I didn't add anything to my "Very funny" comment, Lori stood and said, "Let's take a walk."

As we walked past cubicles Lori made small talk, asking what it was like living in the same building as Jean. I told her it makes getting scripts back and forth to each other easier. She laughed.

Finally, Lori said, "Sandy will tell you what you do as an assistant story editor." She reminded, "He's the story editor for Care Bears." She was quiet for a long moment as we walked. Then her voice lowered a bit and she added, "While you're at it, keep your eyes open about what he does."

I looked sideways at Lori but she didn't look back at me as we walked. I wondered what she meant by that...

Jack Olesker's career in the entertainment industry spans over four decades. He has served as a story editor in L.A. as well as president of a motion picture and television company in Chennai, India. His writing ranges from Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, Care Bears and Hello Kitty's Furry Tale Theater to documentaries and horror novels and murder mysteries for adults.

HOROSCOPE

APRIL 3-9, 2025

AS INTERPRETED BY SANDY "STAR" BENDT

ARIES MARCH 21—APRIL 19

Spend some time actively resting and recuperating this week. Make inner peace and alone time your main priority. Pull back and get your mental focus and internal dialogue tuned into a more positive frame. Put your mind in line with your goals before you let other people influence you.

TAURUS APRIL 20—MAY 20

Even though you would like to put aside differences and find a common goal with friends and associates, it's important to stand by your values. Don't waste your time trying to fit into places that are not a true refection of your beliefs and principles. Stay true to yourself and the right people will show.

GEMINI MAY 21—JUNE 21

There is great opportunity to make more money and become more financially stable but your personal goals must lineup with the work. Any discrepancies between goals and values will not be sustainable for the long haul. If you want something to last, it has to be authentic.

CANCER JUNE 22—JULY 22

This is the week to cleanup friendships and move away from people that are playing games. You will not be fooled by inauthentic people any longer. Your ability to spot half-truths and fakes are spot on this week. Use it to get rid of people that are jealous or use mind games to control you.

LEO JULY 23—AUGUST 22

Spend some time evaluating the reciprocity and power dimensions of your personal relationships before you continue to give unconditional support. Be sure what you're doing truly reflects how you feel and is in line with your personal priorities. Don't just go along with situations for validation.

VIRGO AUGUST 23—SEPTEMBER 22

Retool and revamp the trajectory of your relationship. If you want a partner that is more focused on financial goals and building a future, then be honest about that. Don't keep things going just to have someone around. There has to be a sense of purpose now. It's not just for fun and games.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23—OCTOBER 22

Work and homelife need to be balanced and in line with your true self in order to succeed now. If you enter into something for material purposes only it will not be worthwhile and could possibly drain your energy and resources. Be true to your inner goals and things will flow more smoothly.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23—NOVEMBER 21

Take the initiative to cleanup your love life. If you are with someone that you really don't want to be with, move on. There is nothing worse than being with someone you really don't like and acting like you do. Not only is it a lie, it damages your credibility when it's obvious how you feel.

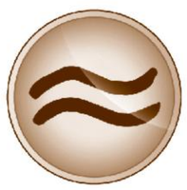
SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22—DECEMBER 21

Spend some time going through your closets and organizing personal items. Evaluate your space to make things flow more smoothly from day to day. Be honest with yourself about the things you have. Are they really a reflection of you or do you have things simply for the status they provide?

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22—JANUARY 19

Be more authentic when you interact with people. If you're not being honest, then you are wasting everyone's time. Avoid being aggressive to prove your point. Instead, be calm and truthful. Say what is on your mind in a constructive way. Don't tear people down with hurtful words.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20—FEBRUARY 18



If things or people don't fit with your purpose, don't force it. Let people come and go while you remain steadfast to what you deem is important. Don't expect people to see value in something just because you do. This is the time to work on your own goals and let people be.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19—MARCH 20

This week you will see things with a new perspective. It may not be comfortable or what you want to see but don't shy away from it; change it if it bothers you. Admitting your unhappy is the first step. Be courageous and truthful with yourself and you won't be tricked by others.

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others. — *Marcus Tullius Cicero*

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Sudoku

Fill in the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9.

	7			2				9
		9					3	
	2					1		6
	1	4						
					7			8
	3			1				2
	6		1				4	3
			9					
7	4	8					2	

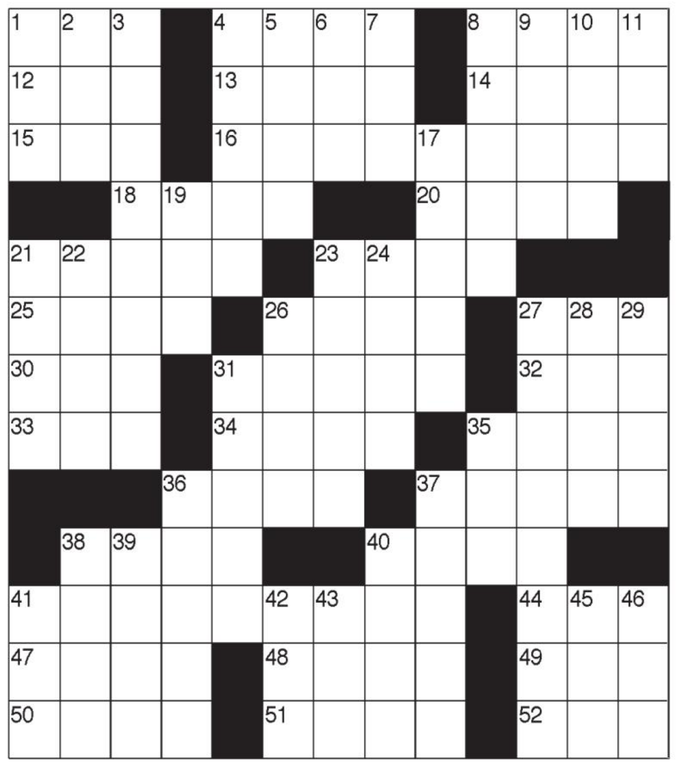
CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

1 Fairy queen
4 This (Sp.)
8 Crazy
12 Presidential nickname
13 Exigency
14 Footless
15 Amer. Standard Version (abbr.)
16 Camera lens
18 Old-fashioned oath
20 Edge
21 Electric unit
23 Volcano crater
25 Gamin
26 Belgian (abbr.)
27 Rhine tributary
30 Newspaper
31 Right-hand page
32 "Blue Eagle"
33 Laconian clan group
34 Noun-forming (suf.)
35 92 (Rom. numeral)
36 Feminine (suf.)
37 Song of praise
38 Fr. chalk
40 College entrance exams
41 Punk
44 Tally
47 Indian lady
48 Freshwater worm
49 Harem room
50 Rosebud, e.g.
51 Weekly (abbr.)
52 Recommended daily allowance (abbr.)

DOWN

1 Sheep's cry
2 Away (pref.)
3 Drink
4 Toward center
5 Sow
6 To or from a distance (pref.)
7 Soft drink
8 Brother of Abraham
9 Atop
10 Carry
11 Carriage
17 Destroying (pref.)
19 Prate
21 Gambling card game
22 Arabic (abbr.)
23 Birthplace of Mohammed
24 High (Lat.)
26 Inclination
27 Antecedent
28 Melody
29 Teem
31 Keck
35 Totem pole
36 Sp. hero (2 words)
37 Rice field
38 Work hard
39 Alb (arch.)
40 Earth
41 Television channel
42 Compass direction
43 Tree
45 Append
46 Sheep's cry



Spring Creek to hold 'Easter Egg Hunt with Horses'

The Spring Creek Equestrian Center will hold its "Annual Easter Egg Hunt with Horses" Saturday, April 19.

The egg hunt will begin promptly at 3 p.m., so guests should come early.

In addition to the egg hunt, children can have their photos taken with the Easter Bunny and S'More, the pony, and there will be horses for children to pet.

Children should bring their own baskets (no plastic bags, please) and dress prepared to get dirty (it's a barn).

Admission is free and everyone is welcome. Spring Creek Equestrian Center is located at 16771 Pardee Road in Three Oaks.

Those who plan to attend should email Alison at algrosse@yahoo.com or text her at 269-756-3894. Please let her know the number and age of children who will be attending, to ensure there are plenty of eggs for the hunt.

For more details, visit www.springcreek-equestrian.com. — STAFF REPORTS

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PUBLIC NOTICES

NEW BUFFALO AREA SCHOOLS IS ACCEPTING STUDENTS FOR THE BISON BEGINNERS PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM AND KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS FOR THE 2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR.

It is helpful to know how many students we will have as we begin planning for the 2025-2026 school year. If you believe your child will qualify for either the Bison Beginners Pre-Kindergarten program or for Kindergarten, please contact the office at 269-469-6060 so we can make sure your student is on our enrollment list. You can also email the elementary school's administrative assistant Jenna Wendel at jwendel@nbas.org. Please contact the office by Monday, April 7, 2025. You will need to include the following information: child's name, birth date, parent/guardian name, address, phone number and email address.

BISON BEGINNERS
Parents/guardians that have children who will be four years old by September 1, 2025 are able to register their child for the Bison Beginners Pre-kindergarten program. The program offers both half-day (a.m. only) or full-day sessions. Enrollment is limited to 25 students.

KINDERGARTEN
Parents/guardians with students that will be five years old by September 1, 2025 are able to register their child for the full-day kindergarten program.

SCHOOL OF CHOICE AND TUITION
If you do not reside in the New Buffalo Area Schools district but do live in Michigan, you are welcome to apply for the School of Choice program. Tuition is also an available enrollment option for students living out-of-state. Information and applications for both programs are on our district's website: https://www.nbas.org/o/nbas/page/school-of-choice-and-tuition-students.

HEARING/VISION/DENTAL SCREENING
Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students planning to attend New Buffalo Elementary for the 2025-2026 school year will be able to have their hearing, vision and dental screening performed by the Berrien County Health Department on Tuesday, April 29, 2025 from 1:00-3:00 pm at New Buffalo Elementary. Appointments are required - please call or email the school office to schedule. This screening is required by the state of Michigan for kindergarten and highly encouraged by our district for pre-kindergarten. Please bring your student's birth certificate (original or a copy), student's immunization record and parent/guardian picture ID.

If you will not be attending the health screening on April 29, please contact the Berrien County Health Department at 269-926-7121, extension 5293 to schedule an appointment or visit their website for more information: www.berriencounty.org/634/hearing-vision-screening.

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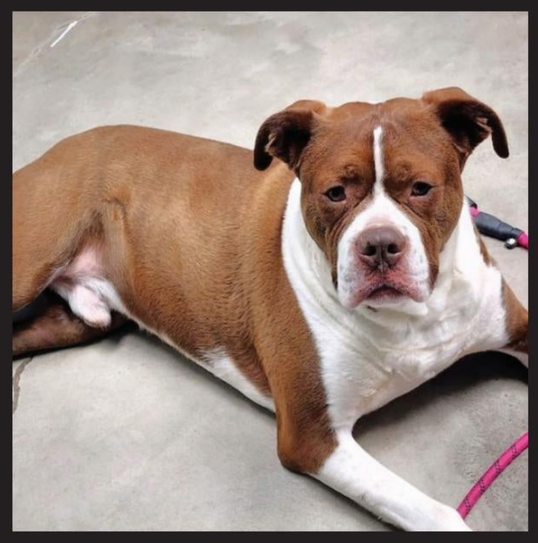

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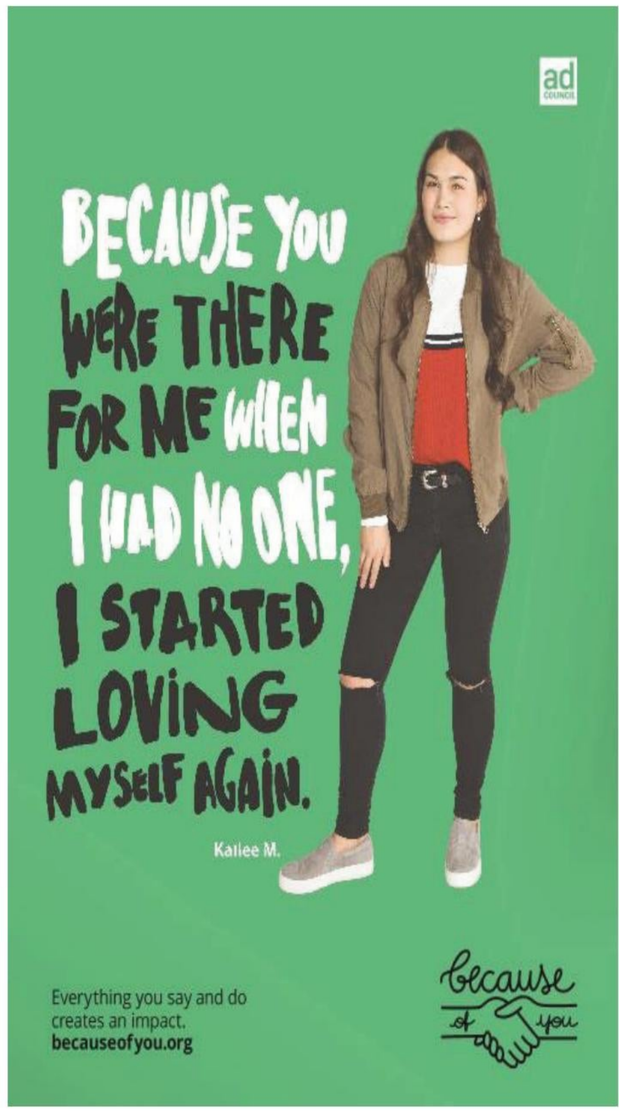
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Christopher Paul Curtis discusses being an author to middle schoolers

New Buffalo middle schoolers with Christopher Paul Curtis

Newberry Award-winning author dispenses advice to young readers

BY FRANCESCA SAGALA

As a Newberry Award-winning author, Christopher Paul Curtis had some tools of the trade to bestow upon students at New Buffalo Middle School when he paid a visit there Wednesday, March 26.

Curtis said that there are four rules that writers must follow: Write every day, have fun with your writing, be patient with yourself if the story doesn't always go in the direction that you intended it to go and, most importantly, ignore any rules.

"When you develop the ability to write, you can move a story around, you can develop characters, use your own style - that's what makes it more interesting, that's what makes it stand out is to put yourself in it," he said.

Curtis grew up in Flint, Michigan. After graduation, he worked in a factory, where he earned what is equivalent today to being $50 an hour putting doors on the driver's side of cars.

As soon as he started making money, Curtis started buying things: an eight-track tape player, a brand-new 1973 Camero. For 13 years, he worked in that factory – and "hated every minute of it."

To pass the time on his half-hour breaks, Curtis read. When the pages of the books he was reading grew "heavier and heavier," he decided he could write a real page turner.

"Finally, I threw the books aside and said, 'I can write something better than that,'" Curtis said.

Soon, he was writing about anything and everything. It wasn't until he quit his job at the factory after having to have his arm sewn up because of removing a plug from a door that Curtis took his writing seriously.

He spent a year holed up in the children's section of the Windsor Public Library, writing. Curtis sent "The Watsons Go to Birmingham" to two contests – one through Little Brown and Company in Boston and the other through Random House in New York.

After receiving a letter of rejection from Little Brown, Curtis learned that he also hadn't won the contest through Random House. Nonethless, they liked the story so much, they wanted to publish it anyways.

A lover of historical fiction, Curtis said the Newberry Award-winning "The Watsons Go to Birmingham" isn't about segregation. Instead, the book traces the family and the way they react to "what happens when they go to the South." "Bud Not Buddy," which won the 2000 Newberry Medal, also isn't a story about the Great Depression.

Throughout each of his books, Curtis stuck in little tidbits of his life to keep the words on the pages flowing.

"I think that's why the books are successful - they related to lot of different people, it's like you're in the closet listening to my family," he said.

In the chapter, "Nazi Parachutes Attack America and Get Shot Down Over the Flint River by Captain Byron Watson and His Flamethrower of Death" in "The Watsons Go to Birmingham" the "13-year-old semi juvenile delinquent," Byron, takes toilet paper parachutes, holds them over the toilet, sets them on fire and flushes them. It's like when Curtis used to light some matches over the toilet and throw them in – "I liked the sound when they hit the water" - until he got caught by his mother. The song in "Bud Not Buddy" was inspired by one he heard sung to him by a little girl.

"She stood straight up, and she cleared her throat, and she pretended she was holding microphone, and she said, 'This song is called, 'Mommy Says No,'" Curtis said, and then prompted the students to sing it along with him.

Seeing as how it was the one that stopped him from having to put doors on cars for a living and made him a writer, Curtis said that "The Watsons Go to Birmingham" is his favorite book.

For the second book, he returned to the same place he'd written his first: the Windsor Public Library.

"I'd go to conferences and people would say to me, 'What are you going to do to top that one?' and I made conscious decision and said, 'I'd go to same place physically where I wrote 'The Watsons'... I wouldn't think about anything but telling the story, which is what I wanted to do," he said.

The visit closed out "March is Reading Month," during which teacher Mary Cooper brings an author to the school every year. Author visits are made possible through a grant from The Pokagon Fund. For the last couple years, students have been able to receive a book, which they can get signed

Cooper said that sixth graders read "The Watsons Go to Birmingham" every year.

"We've been trying to get him (Curtis)for a long time and finally, we made the right connection, and he was able to come," Cooper said.

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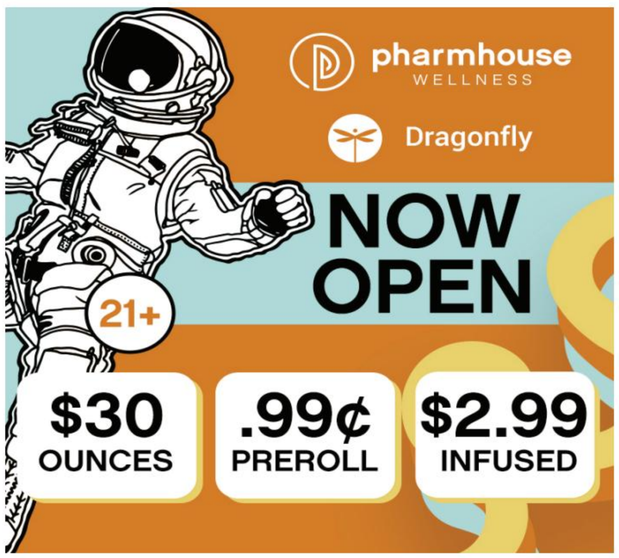

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